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## Rally addresses dredging

**Northwest Indiana Residents for Clean Air plans East Chicago rally protesting dredging project**

**BY JASON THOMAS** Times Staff Writer

*Posted Friday, November 2, 2001*

EAST CHICAGO --- Members of the Northwest Indiana Residents for Clean Air will raise environmental concerns during a Saturday rally against the Indiana Harbor and Ship Canal dredging project planned for 2005.

The rally, at noon Saturday in front of the East Chicago City Hall, was organized by the Committee for a Clean Environment, a sub-committee of Northwest Indiana Residents for Clean Air.

Betty Balanoff, a member of the committee, said the rally will address the chemical concerns connected with the project involving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging 4.6 million cubic yards of toxic sediments from the Indiana Harbor and Ship Canal.

The sediments will be placed in an open-air, 131-acre landfill about 800 feet from East Chicago Central High and West Side Junior High schools in a residential neighborhood.

The sediments will be placed in an open-air, 131-acre landfill about 800 feet from East Chicago Central High and West Side Junior High schools in a residential neighborhood.

"People could get very sick," Balanoff said. "One of the problems we only recently have come to understand is that a lot of these things are much more harmful to children than adults. They can cause birth defects, lower IQ, and a lot of them can cause all kinds of different cancers."

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Balanoff added that birds and rodents can come into contact with the toxins and transfer them to humans.

"Anybody within one mile will have some of these toxins tracked onto their land," she said. "A lot of these creatures will die in yards. How do we get the droppings out of the soil and keep kids from playing in them?"

Those are concerns being addressed by the engineers, according to Monica Ott, project manager with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Chicago District. Ott said the U.S. Army Corps has worked with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to find a suitable location to dispose of the dredge material. According to Ott, the EPA conducted a feasibility study that concluded the material contains an insignificant amount of toxins. However, because of concerns voiced by area residents, a supplemental study currently is being conducted.

The East Chicago Waterway Management District is the local partner in the project.

Ott said the Corps of Engineers is doing its part to allay residents' fears.

"We're definitely concerned about doing what we can to be responsive on the project," she said.

Balanoff said she hopes for a big turnout for Saturday's rally.

"I would like to see a lot of people come out and register their displeasure," she said. "We have been told that if the community doesn't really want it, then they won't do it. They assumed the community wouldn't have any objections, which is what is usually assumed about poor, minority communities."

Jason Thomas can be reached at [jthomas@howpubs.com](mailto:jthomas@howpubs.com) or (219) 836-3780.



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